What is claimed is:

1. A clutch comprising:

an input member to which a rotational torque is input;

a driven member; and

an engaging element enabling wedge engagement in a circumferential direction between the input member and the driven member, the engaging element being provided in an engaging element housing space formed between the input member and the driven member,

wherein the rotational torque is transmitted from the input member to the driven member when the engaging element is engaged in a wedgewise manner in the circumferential direction between the input member and the driven member, and

an engagement portion where the engaging element enables the wedge engagement is provided on one side of the engaging element housing space in an axial direction, whereas a disengagement portion where the wedge engagement of the engaging element is cancelled is provided on the opposite side, and operation means for moving the engaging element in the axial direction between the engagement portion and the disengagement portion is provided.

2. The clutch according to claim 1, wherein the engaging element is a tapered roller, and a retainer for holding the tapered roller is provided between the input member and the driven member so as to be movable in the axial direction, and

the engaging element housing space is formed between the input member and the driven member so as to be narrowed on one side in the axial direction and to be gradually enlarged toward the opposite side, and the engagement portion where the tapered roller is engageable in the circumferential direction is provided on the narrower side of the engaging element housing space whereas the disengagement portion where the wedge engagement of the tapered roller is cancelled is provided on the larger side, and

wherein the tapered roller is provided so that a minor diameter end of the tapered roller is oriented toward the narrower side of the engaging element housing space while the operation means moves the tapered roller forward and backward in the axial direction along with the retainer.

3. The clutch according to claim 2, wherein the retainer has a notch for allowing elastic deformation of the retainer in the circumferential direction on its one end.

4. The clutch according to claim 2, wherein a clutch member engaged with any one of the input member and the driven member in the circumferential direction is provided, and a cam face, with which the tapered roller is engaged in a wedgewise manner in the circumferential direction, is provided for the clutch member.

5. The clutch according to claim 4, wherein a guiding portion for guiding the retainer in the axial direction is provided for the clutch member.

6. The clutch according to any one of claims 2 to claim5, wherein the operation means includes: elastic energizing means for energizing the tapered roller toward the narrower side of the engaging element housing space along with the retainer; and disengaging means for moving the tapered roller toward the larger side of the engaging element housing space along with the retainer against the elastic energizing means so as to cancel the wedge engagement state of the tapered roller.

7. The clutch according to claim 6, wherein the elastic energizing means is constituted, on the larger side of the engaging element housing space, by a spring member

inserted between an inwardly-oriented or outwardly-oriented flange provided for any one of the input member and the driven member, and one end of the retainer.

8. The clutch according to claim 6, wherein the disengaging means includes:

a working member having a pressing portion provided so as to be opposed to a peripheral edge portion of the retainer on a minor diameter side of the tapered roller in the axial direction;

a stationary member being relatively stationary with respect to the engaging element housing space in the axial direction;

a cam mechanism for moving the working member in the axial direction to push and move the tapered roller by the pressing portion along with the retainer when the working member is relatively pivoted in a predetermined direction with respect to the stationary member; and

an operating portion for pivoting the working member.

9. The clutch according to claim 8, wherein the stationary member is a housing for rotatably sheathing the input member and the driven member through a bearing.

10. The clutch according to claim 8, further

comprising an elastic return member for storing an elastic force when the working member is relatively pivoted with respect to the stationary member and for separating the pressing portion of the working member from the engaging element when the working member is relatively pivoted in a reverse direction with respect to the stationary member.

11. The clutch according to claim 10, wherein the elastic return member is constituted by a coil spring having one end tied to the working member and the other end tied to the stationary member.